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ABSTRACT

A study examined United Way's role in solving illiteracy. Concerns of four major constituencies were identified. University representatives saw illiteracy as threatening the social well-being of those affected and seriously damaging the principle of equal opportunity. Business persons felt that illiteracy threatened the nation's competitive edge in today's global economy. Human service delivery system personnel indicated that current delivery systems for promoting literacy were insufficiently coordinated and insufficiently concerned with personal dignity. Human service agency staff saw the incidence of school dropout as a major problem, yet schools rarely reached out for help. The study found that: illiteracy is not an insoluble problem; it has many causes; it is very costly; illiteracy rates are highest among the economically disadvantaged; and the total number of illiterate adults is not changing. The study committee believed that United Way should promote literacy training that goes beyond the teaching of rudimentary reading and writing to embrace the development of mature thinking skills. It recommended that United Way should concentrate its literacy programs on services to adults, encourage preventive programs, and focus on broadening current services to include literacy components while still supporting stand-alone literacy programs. (An appendix describes models of literacy programs that work. For each program, a description, list of results, and contact person are included.) (YLB)

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Illiteracy: A National Crisis

United Way's Role

A Report From
United Way of America's
Strategic Planning Committee

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United Way

Illiteracy: A National Crisis

United Way's Role

A Report From
United Way of America's
Strategic Planning Committee

Adopted by
United Way of America's
Board of Governors
December 10, 1987

United Way
of America

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the United States today, at least 23 million adults are functionally illiterate. At least another 35 million American adults are considered only marginally literate.[1] Studies clearly indicate that illiteracy is exacerbated by a vicious cycle in which illiterate parents are raising illiterate children. Test scores show that even among high school graduates the average reading level is dropping dramatically.

In late 1986, United Way of America designated illiteracy as a priority issue and formed a special study committee to make recommendations on how United Ways could help.

THE CONCERNS OF FOUR CONSTITUENCIES. The study committee examined the special concerns of four major constituencies; some salient points were raised by representatives of these groups. From the perspective of universities, illiteracy especially threatens the social well-being of those affected and seriously damages the principle of equal opportunity. From the perspective of businesses: illiteracy threatens our nation's competitive edge in today's global economy. From the perspective of the human-service delivery system as a whole: current delivery systems for promoting literacy are insufficiently coordinated and insufficiently concerned with the personal dignity of those they serve. From the agency perspective: the incidence of school dropout is a major problem, yet schools rarely reach out to community organizations for help.

OTHER CONCERNS AND FINDINGS. The committee also noted the following facts concerning the origins and magnitude of the problem:

- Illiteracy is not an insoluble problem. Although both agencies and participants in literacy programs have many barriers to overcome, tests show that tutoring and other interventions bring about skill improvements almost immediately.

- Illiteracy has many causes: social, economic, and even physical.

- Illiteracy is very costly. It not only deprives the illiterate of potential income but damages the productivity of businesses and costs taxpayers billions.

- Illiteracy rates are highest among the economically disadvantaged and are closely associated with unemployment, crime, and welfare dependency.

• A sizable portion of the illiterate population is either learning-disabled or non-English speaking. The special needs of these groups warrant specialized materials and approaches.

• Despite current efforts, the total number of illiterate adults is not changing. Literacy programs are reaching only a small fraction of the illiterate population: out of 23 million illiterate adults, less than 4 million are enrolled in programs today.

• In 1985, 61 United Ways supported local literacy organizations. Apart from human-service organizations, many groups are attacking the problem in other ways, including efforts by state governments, corporate-sponsored efforts, and extensive work done through the nation's 1,200 community colleges.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS. The committee believes United Ways should promote literacy training that goes beyond the teaching of rudimentary reading and writing to embrace the development of mature thinking skills.

Further, the committee believes it is essential that all organizations dealing with illiteracy—public schools, private agencies, church groups, and others—work together in close partnership. This will help ensure that the linkage between related social and educational problems is not overlooked and that services are offered without waste or duplication.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNITED WAYS. A survey conducted among local United Ways revealed that most of them are not addressing illiteracy in any major way. Of the literacy programs that are being supported, most appear limited to adult literacy training. The study committee focused on three questions especially important in deciding how United Ways should approach the problem as a whole, and came up with the following answers.

Should United Ways primarily address illiteracy among adults or should they work equally with services for children? Given the investment by the public school system in educating children, United Ways' efforts are most needed in working with adults. At the same time, United Ways encourage better linkage between existing children's literacy services and the efforts of the schools.

Should United Ways primarily encourage remedial programs or preventive programs? United Ways should bring attention to—and support policies that advocate—preventive efforts in the schools and in coordinated, supplemental programs.

Should United Ways restrict their efforts to funding programs or should they try to effect a change in the broader system? United Ways should focus on broadening current services to include literacy components rather than simply funding stand-alone literacy programs. They should seek to coordinate literacy training with related services, making use of existing family and youth programs for literacy assessment and referral. Finally, they should encourage the formation of corps of young volunteer tutors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE ORGANIZATIONS. Statewide United Ways should develop or participate in literacy efforts in partnership with state governments. They should also encourage the formation of a statewide corps of student tutors.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNITED WAY OF AMERICA. United Way of America should form a national committee, including representatives of national service agencies and interested associations. This committee should design innovative programs that can effect broad, long-term changes in the cycle of illiteracy and improve the system of related services. United Way of America should serve as a clearinghouse for information on successful literacy programs across the country.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that in America today there are at least 23 million adults who are functionally illiterate.[2] That is, they lack the reading, writing, and comprehension skills necessary to perform such basic tasks as reading the poison warning on a can of pesticide, filling out a job application form, or exercising the voting rights of citizenship.

Another 35 million to 45 million American adults are believed to be only marginally literate, with reading and writing skills below the minimal survival standards of the seventh grade, a level needed to function well in today's society.[3]

What is even more disturbing is the vicious cycle that adult illiteracy creates for the children of illiterates. Study after study confirms the vital importance of the parents' role in helping children learn to read and write. And the facts show that children are suffering. One million children between ages 12 and 17 are unable to read above the third-grade level. Fifteen percent of recent graduates—not dropouts—from urban high schools read at less than a sixth-grade level. Thirteen percent of all 17-year-olds are functional illiterates. The story for minorities is still bleaker. Forty-seven percent of all black 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate.[4]

These facts and others, uncovered by its environmental scanning effort, led United Way of America's Strategic Planning Committee in late 1986 to designate illiteracy as a national critical issue for the United Way system. The committee formed a special study committee to recommend a greater role for United Way in solving this pervasive problem.

II. THE SPECIAL STUDY COMMITTEE: PROCESS AND ISSUES

The Special Study Committee was recruited in early 1987 by Richard M. Morrow, chairman of United Way of America's Strategic Planning Committee and chairman and CEO of Amoco. W. Bruce Thomas, vice chairman of USX, and Edward Brennan, chairman and CEO of Sears, Roebuck and Co., were chosen by Mr. Morrow as committee chairman and vice chairman, respectively.

The committee membership included individuals from United Way of America's Strategic Planning Committee, volunteers and professional staff from local United Ways, and representatives from national organizations that had an interest in illiteracy. (A complete membership roster appears on pages 19 and 20.)

The Perspectives of Four Constituencies

Meeting three times at United Way of America from March through July 1987, the committee was briefed on the nature of the illiteracy issues through four presentations that outlined the perspectives of its membership. Key points from these presentations are outlined here.

The University Perspective. Monsignor John Petillo, chancellor of Seton Hall University, made the following points.

- The immediate social and human consequences of illiteracy are as alarming as the statistics.
- Illiteracy threatens the principle of equal opportunity (16 percent of whites, 44 percent of blacks, and 54 percent of Hispanics are functionally illiterate).[5]
- Illiteracy creates a vicious cycle for the children of illiterate adults. (How can 60 million adults who cannot read books possibly help their children develop reading skills?)

The Business Perspective. Pierce Quinlan, executive vice president of the National Alliance for Business, made the following key points.

- Our society and economy have become part of a global economy; we need a more competitive work force.
- Three out of four new jobs created between now and the year 2000 will require more than a high school diploma.
- Eighty percent of the year 2000's work force is already working today. Many of these workers are in the marginally literate category.

The Perspective of Human Service Delivery Systems. William Milliken, president of Cities in Schools, made the following points.

- In order to reach young people and their families struggling with illiteracy and its attendant problems, new systems of service delivery must be created.
- These delivery systems should strive to recapture the power of the personal approach and recognize that personal dignity comes from empowering an individual to solve his/her own problems with available resources.
- The delivery systems must be made responsible and accountable.
- The delivery systems must be well coordinated, allowing us to view the total person and his or her multiple problems. We can no longer view illiteracy as an isolated issue.

The Human Service Agency Perspective. Clarence Wood, vice president of the National Urban League, made the following points.

- Thirty percent-plus of children drop out of school, mainly those who have reading and writing problems.[6]
- The poor are most likely to become school dropouts.
- Too often, schools are not reaching out to community organizations that could help.

In addition, the committee viewed the "20/20" broadcast on illiteracy; heard presentations on IBM's computer-based literacy project, Write to Read, and on the program of Literacy Volunteers of America; and received an in-depth report from United Way of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) concerning its Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS). (See Appendix B for summaries of these programs.)

United Way Issues and Concerns

A special survey was conducted by United Way of America's Community Problem Solving Division to collect information on local United Way projects aimed at illiteracy. The results of this survey showed that programs addressing illiteracy were not supported in a major way by United Ways. United Way-supported programs were primarily adult-focused; remedial programing was done by one-on-one tutors.

The committee membership itself completed a questionnaire, on which they expressed their views on potential United Way community problem-solving roles, barriers that need to be overcome in exercising these roles, and innovative ways in which these roles may be filled.

During the course of the committee's work, the following three issues surfaced with respect to the focus and role of United Way's effort to address illiteracy:

1. **Adults vs. children.** With the primary responsibility for the public education of children clearly taken up by the government, should United Ways focus solely on adults?

2. **Preventive vs. remedial.** The heart of this issue recognized that many of the existing literacy programs for adults are remedial, i.e., teaching skills that should have been learned earlier in life. Should United Ways' efforts be focused on this type of approach or should they focus on children in order to forestall the adult problem?

3. **Program Allocations vs. System Change.** Should United Ways merely fund programs providing direct services, or should they engage both in funding and other community problem-solving activities aimed at creating a systemic change in the community as a whole?

III. STUDY FINDINGS

Illiteracy is a solvable problem, but it requires commitment, sustained effort, and creativity. Adult illiterates find it difficult to break lifelong habits and to acquire basic reading and writing skills. Organizations combating illiteracy are unable to reach many in need; the funding required to recruit and train staff and develop special materials is difficult to find. Participant retention is also a problem; in some literacy programs the dropout rate is as high as 40 percent. Nevertheless, up to two million illiterate adults are mastering basic literacy skills each year. The Literacy Volunteers of America estimate that student reading scores improve approximately one grade level with 35 to 45 hours of tutoring. Computer training programs have achieved up to three grade levels of improvement in 100 hours of interaction with the computer.

Illiteracy has many causes. For illiterate individuals, the causes of illiteracy include: family problems, illness, learning disabilities, frequent residential moves, and parents' education. Many children fall behind in school and never catch up. A child may simply need eyeglasses—or may leave school early to get a job because of drug abuse, or because of teenage pregnancy. Seventy percent of native, English-speaking illiterates do not finish high school.[7] (The fact that thirty percent of illiterates are completing high school raises questions about the need for reform in elementary and secondary education.)

Illiteracy is a costly problem. Individuals who are illiterate lose both income and opportunities for self-improvement. Businesses lose through accidents, errors, and low productivity. They also pay an indirect penalty because of unemployment and other social problems that are associated with illiteracy and that increase taxes. It is estimated that the cost of illiteracy to business and the taxpayer is $20 billion annually, including the cost of business training programs focused on literacy skills and the cost of errors and accidents caused by workers who can't read directions. Also included are the costs of sustaining people who can't get work because of their inability to read and write and those who are incarcerated because they've turned to drugs and crime.

Illiteracy is associated with many social problems. Illiteracy is highly dispersed among regions of the country and among ethnic and socioeconomic groups, but illiteracy rates are highest among the economically disadvantaged.

Studies show that adults with minimal or no reading and writing skills account for:

- An estimated 50 to 75 percent of the unemployed;

- Thirty-three percent of mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children;
- Eighty-five percent of juveniles who appear in court; and[8]
- At least 50 percent of prison inmates.[9]

Since illiteracy, as an underlying cause, is closely associated with poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency, and crime, increasing the literacy rate can help lower the incidence of these major social problems.

Illiterate adults with learning disabilities and those for whom English is a second language have special needs. The ABC/PBS "White Paper on Illiteracy" estimates that between 10 and 30 percent of illiterate adults are learning disabled. Census data indicate that 37 percent are non-English-speaking persons (22 percent Spanish-speaking and 15 percent from other language groups). Together, these two groups represent a sizable portion of the adult illiterate population. Nevertheless, the majority of illiterate adults have no learning disabilities.

The learning-disabled and non-English-speaking can be helped, but effective efforts require that their distinct needs be identified and that special materials and teaching techniques be developed by educators and applied by volunteer tutors and others.

Adult literacy must be seen as having many benefits. Literacy, while a benefit in itself, must be seen in the larger context as a major step toward employment, becoming a better citizen, a better parent, and improving the lives of family and children.

Literacy training must be something more substantial than just "learning to read." Recognition of words will not be enough in a society where job changes will be more frequent and demanding. A broader definition of literacy should include the mastery of the thinking skills needed to thoroughly grasp and comprehend the *meaning.* Jobs of the future will require higher levels of reading and comprehension skills.

Only a small percentage of illiterate adults is currently being reached by literacy programs. Approximately 4 million adults are enrolled in all literacy and remedial education programs sponsored by public and private organizations. Less than half of those enrolled will become literate within one year.

According to the United Way of America Fund Distribution report, in 1985, 61 United Ways contributed $750,000 to 65 local literacy organizations. Most organizations funded were affiliated with Laubach

Literacy Action or Literacy Volunteers of America. Not identified were other United Way-funded programs that have a literacy activity as a secondary purpose.

Although each year as many as two million adults are achieving basic literacy skills, more than two million persons are *added* each year to the illiterate population. One million leave school without basic literacy skills. In addition, 1.3 million persons without literacy skills in English immigrate to the United States each year. Even though much is being achieved, the total number of illiterate people remains the same.

The pervasiveness of illiteracy across all regions of this country and across all population groups, along with the resultant high social cost of the problem, demand, community action.

Many other groups are attacking the problem. Many state governments are marshaling their resources to focus on the problem of illiteracy. These efforts include many departments, such as education, social services, corrections, higher education, libraries, aging, and employment security.

The 1,200 community colleges' commitment to adult literacy instruction has been reinforced by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges' 1987 public policy agenda, which specified literacy as a focus of concern. In June 1987, a nationwide teleconference was held on the subject of literacy, involving advocates representing government, education, business, industry, labor, and community-based groups. The teleconference linked 100,000 of these advocates as they met on a number of college campuses across the country.

The Special Role of Community Colleges

In 1985, community colleges received 21 percent (about $40 million) of the total federal and state outlay for Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs (with 60 percent going to public school-based programs). In five states (Iowa, North Carolina, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Washington), community colleges constitute the exclusive system for delivering basic skills to out-of-school adults. In seven states (Alaska, Idaho, Kansas, Nebraska, Nevada, Wyoming, and New Mexico), community colleges are the predominant source of ABE instruction, with school districts and other community groups playing a lesser role.

In still other places, such as California, Florida, and Texas, community colleges are responsible for a substantial portion of ABE. The programs of California and Florida alone serve some 1.1 million

persons, nearly 40 percent of the adults served by ABE nationwide. The unique and historical partnership between community colleges and business and human-service agencies suggests that community colleges have a special role to play in addressing adult illiteracy. This role lends itself to the formation of a strategic link between community colleges and the United Way in addressing this problem.

ABC and PBS television networks will continue their joint programing on the issue and in the 1987-88 broadcast season will focus on basic skills (reading, math computation, grammar, verbal and written communication skills) in the workplace. The American Bar Association, The National Governors' Association, and the National Alliance for Business have all designated illiteracy as a major issue and are designing programs. The Dayton-Hudson and Gannett Foundations, as well as other foundations, are funding literacy initiatives. In a number of communities this diversity of effort, as well-meaning as it is, creates unnecessary duplication and competition for scarce resources.

Key Finding for United Way

The study committee finds United Way—in its community problem-solving—is uniquely positioned to act as a catalyst to focus the needed community action. United Way has a long history of being able to mobilize community action and can bring to bear the leadership necessary to raise to a higher level the community's effort to address illiteracy. United Way's access to numerous agencies and thousands of volunteers makes it a natural choice as the coordinator of community effort. The existing infrastructure of local United Way organizations, with strong local leadership across a broad spectrum of business and service organizations, provides an excellent network that can be efficiently utilized to coordinate and enhance present and proposed efforts to combat illiteracy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Study Committee reaffirmed that the primary strength of United Way is its ability to bring community leaders together to address specific concerns. Thus it believes that a "systems"-change perspective should be the primary focus of United Way activity both on a national and local level.

Recommendations for United Ways.

- **The Pittsburgh Model.** The success of the United Way Task Force in Pittsburgh (see Appendix B for a program description) can stand as a model for local United Way consideration. The recommendation of this model does not mean that United Ways should restrict their focus to working with adults or toward systems change. Each United Way must make its own decisions after a careful review of local conditions and existing programs. It should examine the need for research; for enhancing community awareness and expertise; and for linking services through Information and Referral and Voluntary Action Centers. If another organization is actively coordinating local efforts, the United Way should consider joining (if not already involved) and help raise the effort to a higher level.

- **Focusing on Adults.** Regarding the issue of whether United Ways should focus their efforts on illiteracy among children or illiteracy among adults, the committee concluded that the public schools should bear the prime responsibility for children and the private sector for adults. Nevertheless, recognizing United Ways' significant investment in both youth and family services, the committee encourages every United Way and related agencies to consider including literacy components in services provided for youth, or developing the linkage or referral mechanisms to literacy programs for children in need of help. These programs should be coordinated with schools and school services. Programs for families should include the development of parenting skills.

- **Broadening Current Services.** The committee further recognized that United Ways are currently providing a relatively low funding level for stand-alone literacy programs. While additional funds may be needed to expand these services, the committee agreed that the primary focus should be on broadening current services to include literacy efforts.

- **Raising Awareness.** Recognizing the long-term need for public education concerning this issue, the committee encourages United Ways, again in their problem-solving role, to bring attention to the

issue by leveraging, where necessary, the public schools to address illiteracy through effective policies and programs.

- **Linking Literacy With Other Needed Skills.** United Ways should ensure that literacy programs focus on "understanding" (comprehension skills) as well as reading and writing. These programs should also be tied wherever possible to training for employment.

- **Coordinating and Ensuring Related Services.** United Ways should look beyond the direct programing to see what supporting services are necessary and whether they are already funded by United Way (e.g., transportation and day-care services). Coordinating the assistance of services like these and linking such assistance to literacy training might be an important role for United Ways.

- **Referrals and Other Service Linkage.** In addition to support services for individuals needing help, United Ways should seek development of additional means, working through agency personnel who are in touch with families, to help identify those in need and direct them to programs.

United Ways should examine their needs-assessment reports to see how illiteracy is tied to other identified community problems and to encourage program linkage and literacy program development where appropriate (e.g., related to school drop-out or unemployment).

- **Serving and Involving Youth.** United Ways should work in concert with youth-serving agencies to guide youngsters who need help into literacy programs. United Ways also should consider developing educational programs for youngsters so they may assist those in their own homes who may be illiterate and need help.

Recommendations for United Way State Organizations

- Some governors have established statewide groups to combat illiteracy. United Way state organizations should tie into this work wherever possible. If no state effort exists, United Way should consider inaugurating one.

- United Ways should consider developing "literacy corps," drawing from junior and senior high school students and college students and training them as tutors.

Recommendations for United Way of America

- The committee encourages United Way of America to designate illiteracy as a national problem of concern to the United Way system and form a national committee with its funded national agencies and

others (such as the American Bar Association, ABC/PBS, National Governors' Association, and the National Alliance for Business, as well as representatives of its own NCL and United Way at Work programs) to develop innovative programs aimed at delivery systems change and coordination.

• United Way of America should act as a clearinghouse for the sharing of information on successful program models.

The study committee believes the United Way mission—"To increase the organized capacity of people to care for one another"—could find no better application than in dealing with the issue of illiteracy.

SOURCE NOTES

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APPENDIXES

A. Roster of United Way of America's Special Study Committee on Illiteracy

B. Select Models of Current Literacy Programs That Work

APPENDIX A: ROSTER OF UNITED WAY OF AMERICA'S SPECIAL STUDY COMMITTEE ON ILLITERACY

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APPENDIX B: SELECT MODELS OF LITERACY PROGRAMS THAT WORK

"United Way at Work" Literacy Program
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Description

The United Way of the Piedmont in Spartanburg, South Carolina, sponsors a successful literacy effort at selected companies with United Way at Work programs. The United Way at Work program links services and volunteers to those at the workplace who need them. The agency working with this United Way for the implementation of literacy services at the workplace is AWARE—Adult Writing and Reading Education. AWARE staff and volunteers participate in United Way at Work by developing ten different, brief lunch-time seminars about literacy and its impact on community problems. During these seminars AWARE literature is distributed. These seminars also surface volunteer tutors as well as individuals in need of assistance.

AWARE tutors learn "Each One Teach One" or the Laubach method for teaching clients to read.

Results

- Established literacy programs at five companies.
- At one company, trained 22 tutors who, since July 1986, have taught 80 fellow employees to read.

Contact:
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United Way of Allegheny County/PLUS Project
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Description

The United Way/PLUS (Project Literacy U.S.) Task Force acts as a catalyst to bring together decision makers, key leaders, volunteer organizations, and action-oriented people in the community. Chaired by Robert W. Hannan, president of Thrift Drug Co., the task force includes

more than 70 people who represent a wide cross-section of the community and ensure a broad-based effort.

The United Way/PLUS literacy initiative provides volunteer opportunities at two important levels. At a leadership level, task force participants are influencing policy decisions, working with leaders in the public and private sectors, generating human and financial resources, and mobilizing the business, religious, and professional communities to support literacy efforts. The task force has five working committees.

- Needs Assessment—Documents high-risk communities and compiles lists of existing providers.
- Media Promotion—Develops and places public service announcements (PSAs) and literacy stories in the electronic and print media.
- Community Response—Works with the religious community and with volunteer service organizations.
- Legislative—Advocates for the inclusion of funds for adult literacy in the state budget.
- Business—Raises the level of awareness in the business community and encourages businesses to support literacy programs. A particular emphasis of the task force is to help the unemployed improve their literacy skills.

Adult literacy programs are volunteer intensive. At a grass-roots level, large numbers of volunteers are recruited and placed with providers of literacy services to work as assessors and tutors and in support positions. Literacy councils recruit, train, and support volunteers who are paired with adult students, usually on a one-to-one basis. Volunteers receive from four to 12 hours of training and make a commitment of two to three hours of tutoring a week for a year. The task force uses a central United Way information referral number for the recruitment of literacy volunteers and for individuals in need of literacy services.

Results

- Responded to more than 2,300 people who have come forward either as students, tutors, or literacy volunteers since PLUS began.
- Tripled the number of students enrolled in the area's literacy programs.
- Brought more than 700 volunteers into literacy programs and activities.
- Stimulated public and private funds for literacy efforts. United Way/PLUS was instrumental in convincing the Pittsburgh City Council

to allocate seed money for the Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative (PLI), a new, permanent communitywide coordinating office for literacy resources and activities. In 1986, the appropriation in the Pennsylvania state budget of a first-time allocation for adult literacy services—of $2 million—is credited to lobbying resulting from the PLUS initiative. The 1987-1988 state budget includes $5 million for literacy.

- Helped to leverage private funding. An anonymous foundation provided a grant for special orientation and tutor training workshops, staff to match students and tutors, and the development of a workbook on how to begin a literacy program in nonurban areas.

- Created with the local community college a centralized assessment center to screen students and facilitate their entry into literacy programs appropriate to their learning needs.

- Generated second-year funding for Project LEARN. LEARN is an indigenous neighborhood volunteer tutoring program for adults that has proven to be very successful. Based at United Way multiservice agencies in high-risk areas, the program is sponsored by the United Way's Volunteer Action Center and a local literacy provider. Site committees, volunteer tutors, and students are recruited and trained in target neighborhoods; other programs available at the agencies provide support services that help to retain learners.

- Stimulated a cooperative effort between IBM, a local vocational training center, and task force members to develop a pilot project in computer-based learning. The project will use new IBM software for adult learners below the eighth-grade level. The task force is working with the vocational training center to design the program and recruit students from areas with high unemployment. It is anticipated that participants who successfully complete the program will be equipped to enter successful vocational education programs where an eighth-grade reading level is a prerequisite. The project will provide a model for linking basic literacy programs, vocational education, and employment.

- Greatly expanded the service delivery system's capacity for literacy activities.

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IBM—Principles of the Alphabet Literacy System (PALS) Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Georgia

Description

This program uses an interactive video disc to help students build skills in typing, writing, and reading. The hardware needed is an IBM Info-Window, which includes a personal computer, video disc player, special touch-sensitive screen, and stereo-audio system. Students interact with the animated characters in a story developed on the screen and complete exercises using the computer as the story unfolds. The program is designed for adolescents and adults reading below the sixth-grade level. This system has been piloted in two schools, one in Washington, D.C., and the other in Atlanta, Georgia. At Cardozo High School in Washington, 23 students in the bottom 10 percent of their class were selected for the test projects.

Results

- Improved students' motivation to learn to read;
- Increased average reading levels by three grades in 20 weeks;
- Eighteen of the 23 students at Cardozo High School graduated; and
- One-third of the 23 Cardozo students went to college.

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SER—Jobs for Progress, Inc.—Family Learning Centers for Literacy Training Milwaukee, Wisconsin Washington, D.C. Denver, Colorado

Description

This Hispanic literacy program is being implemented through Family Learning Centers (FLCs) piloted in Milwaukee, Denver, and Washington, D.C.

The FLC concept, designed to reach functionally illiterate persons 16 and older, consists of three major interrelated components:

1. A computer-assisted literacy instruction program, supported by

2. A literacy council comprised of representatives from the public schools, corporate America, and Hispanic community and parents, and

3. Child care with intergenerational support.

The literacy instruction involves the computer and all other methods found to be successful in education, but also includes the supportive role of family members working together to educate each other. Specifically, the Family Learning Centers are well organized and manage centers whose literacy programs have the following features:

- Literacy is taught at the same time that job skills are taught and as close to the workplace as possible, in programs tailored to individual needs. Job skills are the subject matter of the reading materials used in the literacy training.

- Technology, such as computers and video discs, is used to support teachers. Technology can deliver high-quality material to a wide variety of settings and students.

Results

- Eight hundred participants (70 percent Hispanic and 28 percent black) enrolled in the three pilot sites.

- Forty-three percent of the participants showed a gain of two or more grade levels in reading per 100 hours of instruction.

- Sixty percent showed a gain of two or more grade levels in mathematics per 100 hours of instruction.

- Fourteen percent acquired high school diplomas, two percent completed vocational training, and seven percent acquired GED certificates.

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Literacy Volunteers of America—Buffalo and Erie County (LVA-BEC)
Buffalo, New York

LVA-BEC is an affiliate of the National Literacy Volunteers of America, whose mission is to combat the problem of illiteracy in the U.S. The Buffalo program is targeted toward those adults who read below the fifth-grade level and toward immigrants who, because of language barriers, cannot read English at all. The program's primary premise is that well-trained and carefully supported volunteers can be effective tutors of adults, and that the enlistment of a huge pool of talented volunteers can have a significant impact on the problem. Toward this end, a telethon was held on the local public-broadcasting television station. The telethon brought about dramatic program results, doubling the recruitment of tutors and the enrollment of students. Tutors were provided with 18 hours of training, and students spent an average of two hours per week in the program.

Results

- During a six-month period, July-December 1986, the number of tutors volunteering increased from 376 to more than 800.
- During the same period, the number of student participants increased from 398 to more than 900.
- Approximately 66 percent of all those enrolled gained .5 to .9 grade levels.
- Eight percent of those enrolled gained 1 to 1.9 grade levels.
- Seven percent of those enrolled gained 2 to 2.9 grade levels.
- Five percent of those enrolled gained 3 or more grade levels.

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Detroiters for Adult Reading Excellence (DARE)
Detroit, Michigan

DARE is a literacy coalition in Detroit whose formation was spearheaded by Jane Hale Morgan, retired director of the Detroit Public Library, to provide citywide coordination of literacy programs. DARE recruits and maintains a corps of volunteer reading tutors, attracts citywide attention and resources for dealing with the problems of illiteracy, and enlists business and industry support. Through a series of television programs on educational and commercial channels, DARE was able to recruit both tutors and individuals who wanted to be tutored. It arranged training for the tutors through the local chapter of Literacy Volunteers of America and then matched tutors with students.

Results

- Between November 1984 and August 1987, 829 tutors were trained.
- During that same period, 950 students were tutored.
- They secured a pool of funding based on a matching grant of $50,000 from Time, Inc.
- The Detroit Public Library purchased materials for the adult beginning-reading level, 7,700 copies of 900 titles, all available for program use.
- On average, participants gained two grade levels over a 50-week period of two-and-one-half hours per week.

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